

# FACTSHEET

## *Wildlife Services*

United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Animal and  
Plant Health  
Inspection  
Service

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## WS Assistance at Airports

Protecting agriculture, property, natural resources, and health and human safety from wildlife damage is the mission of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services (WS) program. WS also addresses wildlife threats to public health and safety. Birds and other wildlife can pose significant threats to both human safety and property when they occur near airports. Through a balanced effort involving research and wildlife management, WS biologists are reducing the incidence of wildlife-caused damage to U.S. aviation.

### Wildlife Problems at Airports

The wings of planes and the wings of nature often compete for the same airspace at the same time. When that happens, collisions may occur, sometimes resulting in injuries or death to passengers and crew and damage to aircraft. To help prevent these potentially dangerous interactions, WS biologists provide airport officials across the Nation with advice and recommendations on how to keep runways and flightpaths clear of wildlife. Problem species include deer, moose, antelope, coyotes, dogs, gulls, blackbirds, pigeons, waterfowl, ducks, hawks, starlings, vultures, and others.

Airports in the Eastern and Southeastern United States experience the greatest number of wildlife-aircraft collisions, but the problem exists nationwide. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) estimates that birds and animals threaten human safety and cause \$200 million in damage each year to aircraft in this country. Indirect costs, such as flight delays, aircraft changes, and loss of revenues, add immeasurably to direct costs.

In 1992, 70 bird-aircraft strikes at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport, the world's busiest, resulted in \$8 million in damage to aircraft, while 101 bird-aircraft strikes at John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFKIA) in New York caused millions of dollars worth of damage. Since 1979, bird-aircraft collisions at JFKIA have resulted in 42 aborted takeoffs and 37 damaged or destroyed engines.

### The History of Wildlife Strikes

The first reported wildlife-aircraft strike occurred on April 12, 1912, when a Model EX Wright Pusher collided with a gull and crashed into the ocean, killing the pilot. FAA reports that more than 100 people have died and 40

planes have been destroyed in wildlife-related aviation accidents since the early 1900's.

- In 1960, a plane taking off from Boston's Logan Airport struck a large flock of starlings and gulls and went down, resulting in 62 human deaths.
- In 1973, a jet crashed shortly after takeoff from the DeKalb-Peachtree Airport in Georgia after colliding with birds, killing seven persons onboard and injuring one person on the ground.
- In 1975, a plane sucked herring gulls into its engine at JFKIA. The engine exploded and separated from the aircraft, the takeoff was aborted, and the plane caught fire and was destroyed. Fortunately, no fatalities occurred, largely because all 139 passengers were airline employees trained in evacuation procedures.
- In 1987, a jet hit a deer at O'Hare International Airport, resulting in an aborted takeoff and \$100,000 in damage to the aircraft.



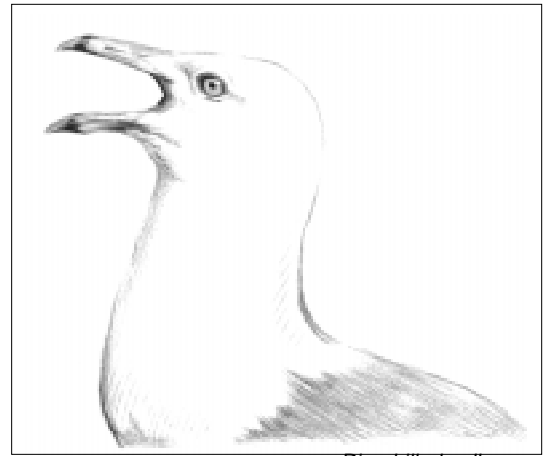
*White-tailed deer*

- In 1988, an aircraft sucked birds into its engine upon takeoff in Denver, CO, resulting in two deaths, one injury, and extensive damage to the airport. That same year, a jet hit a red fox on the runway at Standiford Field in Louisville, KY, and a jet fighter struck a mallard duck on takeoff at Cannon International Airport in Reno, NV.
- In 1991, a plane carrying 350 passengers aborted takeoff at JFKIA after gulls were drawn into 1 of its engines. Although no one was seriously injured, the aircraft lost its brakes and 10 tires in the accident.
- In 1992, a twin-engine, turbo-prop commercial aircraft struck a white-tailed deer while landing at Laredo International Airport in Texas, resulting in extensive damage to the propeller and fuselage.
- In 1993, just 1 herring gull in the left engine of a plane carrying 158 passengers out of O'Hare shut the engine down, necessitating an emergency landing. Damage to the plane was estimated at \$1.5 million.
- On two separate occasions in 1994, a commercial aircraft struck a coyote during takeoff at O'Hare.

## How WS Helps

When airports experience wildlife conflicts, FAA encourages airport officials to contact WS. Programs to control wildlife hazards at airports are often complex and require much coordination. WS wildlife biologists offer technical and direct operational assistance to airport managers and are available to conduct onsite evaluations of wildlife problems at the airport. All WS programs are conducted pursuant to Federal and State laws, regulations, and policies.

WS biologists recommend the use of noise-making devices, such as cracker shells, propane cannons, and bird distress tapes. In addition, WS provides guidance on how to modify habitat to make the airport unattractive to wildlife. These recommendations include reducing water and garbage sources at the airport; installing wildlife-resistant fences; modifying or removing overgrown vegetation, trees, and roosting sites; and trapping and relocating wildlife. If these techniques fail, the Department of the Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or the State's wildlife department may issue a permit to remove a limited number of the problem species from the airport.



*Ring-billed gull*

WS' National Wildlife Research Center conducts research on new harassment methods, wildlife behavior, habitat management, and how landfills near airports affect bird-aircraft strikes. This research will help WS develop new ways to minimize wildlife hazards at airports. Additionally, WS wildlife biologists are active in a number of professional groups, such as The Wildlife Society and Birdstrike Committee USA. The latter organization facilitates the exchange of information, supports research and develops new technologies, provides training, and acts as a liaison to Canadian and European counterparts. WS biologists are also members of special task forces at airports, including JFKIA and O'Hare, that are monitoring hazards to the airports and developing control strategies to protect human safety and to conserve wildlife resources.

## Additional Information

You may obtain more information about the Wildlife Services program from any State APHIS, WS office. For the address and telephone number in your area, call the WS Operational Support Staff at (301) 734-7921.